

EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN e-LEARNING

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Abstract

The emergence of the knowledge based society is changing the global status of education. It is the time to develop a new knowledge based global society. This is an age knowledge exploration and explosion. Many innovations like e-lectures, collaborative learning and teaching, tele-teaching, student self-assessment through automated interactive online testing, use of digital resource libraries and the interact and world wide web are the educational tools and techniques of the future. It is the right time for the teacher educators to use more varied and effective teaching learning strategies with employing the most advanced electronic devices which can access and process the rapid knowledge explosion.

e-Learning

In the present world where Globalisation is a rapid and all-encompassing phenomenon, e-Learning is an extremely important tool for the Globalisation of Knowledge. E-Learning or web based education has emerged as a major force in the teaching-learning processes. It has the potential to revolutionize the way we teach and how we learn. It is a broader concept than online learning, encompassing a wide set of applications and processes which uses electronic multimedia technology to deliver education, information, skills, knowledge and individual learning programmes to large audiences, potentially around the globe, using internet and other technology based system. It focuses on "just in time" knowledge delivered anytime and anywhere. The term "e-Learning" is now used in India to capture the general intent to support a broad range of electronic media (Internet, Intranets, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV and CD-Rom) to make learning more flexible for clients. India is perhaps the only country with a satellite completely dedicated to education, the EDUSAT. India has developed educational broadcast channels such as the Gyan Darshan Network and dedicated satellites such as EDUSAT for audio, video and data transmission and interactivity. India has 17 Education Multimedia Research centers and coordination centre, Consortium of Educational Communication which has helped building considerable knowledge resources over a period of 20 years.

BENEFITS OF e-LEARNING:

Dynamism - Learners progress at the pace that suits them best, at the time that suits them best while getting the information that they need.

Real Time - Learning have access to information that is correct and up to date through the web, information databases or university or company intranets.

Collaboration - Learners are able to meet in a virtual space with other members and practitioner experts to discuss issues, answer questions and even participate in simulations and management games without having to leave their office or home.

Speed of delivery- Learners benefit from learning when required, learners are able to access the right sort of training at the right time with the right people.

Convenience - Learners have access when they want it.

Consistency - Learners have access to the same materials.

Global reach - Learners regardless of where they are receive the same message and are able to engage other learners and practitioners globally.

Moreover, e-Learning can be accessed at the same time (synchronous) or at different times (asynchronous).

Mason summarizes the advantages of asynchronous learning as follows:

Flexibility - Students have access to the teaching material (e.g. on the Web, or computer conference discussions) can take place at any time (24 hours of the day, 7 days a week) and from many locations.

Time to reflect - Student have time to mull over ideas, check references, refer back to previous messages and take time to prepare a comment rather than having to react 'on one's feet'.

Situated learning - Because the technology allows access from home and work, the learner can easily integrate the ideas being discussed on the course with the working environment, or access resources on the Internet as required on the job.

Cost-effective technology - Text based asynchronous systems require little bandwidth and how end computer to operate, thus access.

Mason also suggests four equally compelling advantages to synchronous systems:

Motivation - Synchronous system focus the energy of the group, thus students have and added motivation to keep up with their peers and continue with their studies.

Telepresence - Students develop group cohesion and the sense of being part of a learning community through realtime interaction that conveys tone and nuance.

Pacing - Students are encouraged to keep up-to-date with the course, requiring more discipline and in prioritizing their studies.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN e-LEARNING

e-Learning, at its infancy has made in-roads into the Indian educational system in its formative stage. However, numerous challenges remain in the all round development of the e-Learning in India. The growth and transfer of e-Learning is confronted with a number of problems. The factors, such as political will, economic strengths of Indian society, cultural determinants, technological complexities and the complex Indian educational system itself influence the growth and utilization of e-Learning. These factors play very important roles in the case of the developed countries for both expertise and financial assistance. Lack of a regular flow of electricity has led to the under-utilization of the television programs in the villages during the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE).

Teachers play a crucial role in the adoption of e-Learning technology and their attitude towards e-Learning is thus an important determinant. There is an undercurrent of skepticism among some educators that the adoption of e-Learning may lead the further elitism in Indian education. There is a widening gap between those who have and those who do not have.

The Government cannot make technology available to every student to work with. There is a dearth of variety in the courseware. The material borrowed from the developed countries may not be suitable for the student of developing countries like India.

The students excessive dependency on the books is yet another hindering factor as well as a matter of concern. The situation immediately creates two classes of students: the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' which in turn will cause various human problems.

Lack of appropriate instructional design lessens the effectiveness of communication technology.

Non monitoring of utilisation entails to indifferent attitude of the users towards the use of communication technology. Hence, monitoring and follow-up are very essential to ensure effective utilisation of communication technology.

Every college has established the ICT laboratory as it has been made mandatory by NCTE. But the number of computers and other facilities are too low as compared to the student-teachers enrolled in the college.

ICT is not properly integrated into the curriculum. There is wide gap between theory and practice.

Lack of human resources experienced in highly technological societies, suggest that a new role needs to be reinvented for schools. Although more human centered than technology driven, the school of the 21st century needs to embrace technology, with the challenge of virtual communities.

A new challenge of preparing a whole new generation of IT-savvy teachers, fit to survive in the era of rapidly changing technologies. Teachers are expected not only to be experts of subject matter and pedagogy, but also to become pedagogues, who are capable of making use of technological tools for attaining educational goals in a more effective manner.

Traditional short-term workshops which focus on basic computer literacy and web browsing skills have not been effective in helping teachers to integrate technology into their teaching.

Even lack of research in this field is a big problem. The teachers do not want to change. They are not properly trained to carry out researches on their own. There is lack of administrative support to the teaching staff. No incentives are given to competent people.

The institutions lack infrastructural facilities as well as technically trained staff who can handle the equipments effectively

Solution for the Optimum Growth of the e-Learning

The author suggest the following approaches and solutions for the optimum growth of the e-Learning a developing nation on the basis of her experiences:

In the light of the new and crucial role of e-Learning for the knowledge-based society and the far-reaching potential impact of the new ICT technologies on the learning experience, the Government of India should develop a charter for e-Learning in the Indian context.

To provide learners with high quality online learning experiences that meet their needs, designated agencies and institutions should commit themselves to systematically supporting the development of online modules, courses and e-content in user-friendly forms.

The learning infrastructure for a knowledge based society should be built in India providing the strongest possible foundation for effective penetration of e-Learning at the grass root level.

There is a need for new focus of collaboration among institutions at the regional, state national and international levels: universities, colleges and schools should establish an integrated strategic planning process. The government need to be determined to provide substantial funding in such a way as to stimulate new online education and renew existing materials both at the course and programme levels. There is a real need for sustained support on all fronts in the establishment and expansion of educational programmes to teach and foster the required e-Learning skills in the Indian teacher force. Additional resources to facilitate research and experimentation in e-Learning should be continuously made available. Faculty members should be empowered with easy access to wide range of instructional designs and technical support tools. Special training programmes need to be organized for teacher educators so that they themselves acquire knowledge, understanding and skills for using ICT. This will help them in developing a positive attitude towards the use of ICT. Asynchronous modalities of training will be more useful in training teachers according to their individual needs. e-Training if designed and developed appropriately, will provide real benefits to teachers.

In India, we face many difficult problems. The problems are immense, no doubt, but so is our will and our determination and so is the will of the innumerable people of India. The dream of implementing e-Learning can turn into reality only after putting life into these considerations.

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